



**“When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (I Corinthians 13:10).**

## **The Temporary Gifts**

**Central Truth:** some gifts exercised by the apostles are not given today.

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**Topic:** Holy Spirit: Gifts of.

Should we expect to see in operation today all of the spiritual gifts reported in New Testament times? Christians are divided in their answers. Those in the charismatic movement answer with an enthusiastic yes. Those outside the movement respond with an assured no. But the important issue is not what we think about it, but what the Bible says about it.

The gifts mentioned in the New Testament can be classified as “sign gifts” and “serving gifts.” The exercise of the sign gifts carried such a miraculous element that those who observed had to respond, *“We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him”* (John 3:2). They were a foundation for faith, for they proved that the messenger and his message were from God.

We believe the sign gifts were temporary. They were in operation until the New Testament revelation was completed. Then they ceased. That is why they are called temporary gifts. Our great God can give any gift He pleases. But we believe He does not give the sign gifts today.

### **I. THE PURPOSE OF THE SIGN GIFTS (Mark 16:17-20)**

**A. Sign gifts were given to meet human need** (verses 17, 18). That need was fourfold, according to the lesson text.

(1) Deliverance: *“in my name shall they cast out devils”* (verse 17). That is evidently the work of God. Jesus cast out demons and gave His disciples the power to do likewise (Luke 9:1; 10:17). His authority over

demon spirits was recognized by the demons and the people who beheld Him exorcising them. Paul had that power also (Acts 16:17, 18; 19:11, 12). That great deliverance from the power of the devil was a testimony for God.

(2) Declaration: *“they shall speak with new tongues”* (verse 17). The gift of languages began on Pentecost following the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:4). It came totally unexpected and unsought by those who received it. Suddenly they were able to witness in the native languages and dialects of people from fifteen different areas of the world (Acts 2:8). It was explained that they spoke *“as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4). The result was that three thousand people were converted to faith in Jesus in one day in the very city where He was tried, condemned, and crucified. What a miracle!

(3) Protection: *“they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them”* (verse 18). They did not play with poisonous serpents to demonstrate their faith, but they were protected from their venom when a bite came in the midst of their service for God (as in Acts 28:3-6). Such protection was a sign from God that the messenger was His.

(4) Healing: *“they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover”* (verse 18). Miracles of physical healing abound in the ministry of Jesus and in the first half of the book of Acts. God healed as He pleased and when He pleased. It was an act of God and not a ministry of a man of God. Healing was proof that the messenger was God's messenger. Note that the sign gifts were for the benefit of people. That is an indication of the loving concern of God.

**B. Sign gifts were related to the proclamation of the gospel** (verse 20). No miracle was performed for the sake of the miracle. Its purpose was to strengthen the witness of the gospel (Luke 23:8, 9). The Lord, worked through the sign gifts, *“confirming the word with signs”* (verse 20). They were not used to draw crowds or to promote the preacher, but to confirm the truth of the gospel.

**C. Sign gifts were to confirm the word** (verse 20). To confirm means to establish, to make sure, to certify the authority of the person who spoke the message. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, received a miracle to confirm his faith (Luke 1:20, 64-66). Look at those who claim to exercise the sign gifts today. Where is the emphasis of their preaching? To be like New Testament preaching, it must be the message of salvation. Faith in Jesus, not signs and wonders, must be the emphasis.

**D. Sign gifts were tokens of divine authority and power.** They were to demonstrate that God was at work. They proved that the messenger and

his message were from God. Do we need sign gifts today for such certification? No. We can turn to the Bible to certify our message. The Word of God is more reliable than our interpretation of seemingly miraculous events.

## II. THE LIST OF SIGN GIFTS

**A. Gifts of healings** — The Bible clearly states that gifts of healings (note the plurals) are given by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30). Those who observed such miracles could say nothing against them because they were evidently beyond man's power and must have been the work of God (Acts 4:14).

Does God heal today? Of course He does. Does God heal miraculously today? At times He does. Do we need the gifts of healings today to prove that the gospel is of God? No. The Bible is the only proof we need. Healings are no longer performed as sign gifts from God in our Christian witness.

**B. Gift of miracles** — “*The working of miracles*” was a true spiritual gift. It was one of the sign gifts God gave to the early church (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28, 29). Only a few believers had that gift in those days. No believer has that gift today. Why? We do not need miracles to confirm our message. We have the completed Scriptures in the Holy Bible. It is all the proof we need. Jesus was “*approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him*” (Acts 2:22). But with the Bible as our authority, we need no such authentication today.

**C. Gift of discerning of spirits** — That is the ability given of God to know whether a person is motivated and empowered by the Spirit of God or by demonic spirits. Jesus exercised that gift repeatedly in His earthly ministry (John 2:23-25). It was particularly needed in the early years of the Christian era. But now that we can check teachings by the full Christian revelation recorded in the Bible, that gift is not essential as it was then.

**D. Gift of tongues** — “Tongue” is the translation of the Greek word *glossa*. That term is used with different meanings in the New Testament. (1) It can mean the human tongue, as in Mark 7:33. (2) It can mean anything of an elongated shape like the physical tongue, as in Acts 2:3. (3) It can refer to human speech, particularly joyous words, as in Acts 2:26. (4) It can refer to a distinct human language, as “*the Hebrew tongue*” in John 5:2. As a spiritual gift, it means the ability to speak correctly and fluently in a human

language one has not known before but is enabled to use by the direct enabling of the Holy Spirit. Every reference to speaking in tongues in the New Testament refers to distinct human languages.

**K. Gift of interpretation of tongues** — Here is the God-given ability to understand what is spoken in a language hitherto unknown and to translate that into a language which people understand. The gift was needed in a multilingual congregation. The church at Corinth was the only New Testament church where the gift is said to have operated, perhaps because people from all over the known world lived in Corinth and heard the gospel.

### III. THE CEASING OF SIGN GIFTS (I Corinthians 13:8-13)

**A. Sign gifts cease when “that which is perfect is come”** (verse 10). But the question is, “*What is the perfect person or thing whose coming brings the end to the sign gifts?*” There are three primary interpretations of that statement.

(1) “*That which is perfect*” refers to spiritual maturity. Paul shows the passing from childhood to maturity as the end of one era and the beginning of another. He calls us not to be children but to be mature (I Corinthians 13:11; 14:20). Tongues belong to immaturity, but they cease when spiritual maturity is reached, according to this interpretation.

(2) “*That which is perfect*” is the return of Jesus and the heavenly state. He is “*perfect*,” so “*that which is perfect*” must refer to Him. The problem with that interpretation is that the word “*perfect*” does not refer to moral perfection. It means to be complete or equipped. Jesus would not be referred to as “that which” but “He who” is perfect.

(3) “*That which is perfect*” refers to the completion of the New Testament Scriptures. This is the best interpretation of the text. The sign gifts ceased within one generation of the close of the Christian Scriptures.

**B. Sign gifts cease when that which is “in part” shall “fail,” “cease,” “vanish away,” “be done away.”** All of those verbs suggest that the lesser is swallowed up in the greater. The bit-by-bit revelation of a prophet speaking here and another speaking there will be swallowed up by the full revelation of God in the Christian Scriptures. Knowledge does not cease, for instance, in that there is no knowledge left, but in that it is swallowed up in the full knowledge of completed revelation.

**C. Sign gifts cease when “now” becomes “then” and when “darkly” becomes “face to face”** (verse 12). Interpret the text with the “*now*” and the “*darkly*” referring to Paul's time and not to our time. At that time there was a bit-by-bit and piece-by-piece revelation. But not today. Compared to the

time before the New Testament was completed, we have amazing light today. We do not see “*darkly*” but rather “*face to face.*” God has “*made known unto us the mystery of his will*” (Ephesians 1:9). “*From the beginning of the world*” that mystery “*hath been hid in God*” (Ephesians 3:9). We live in a glorious day when “*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations . . . is made manifest to his saints*” (Colossians 1:26). The entrance of His Word gives light, and with completed Scripture we are living in the age of seeing face to face and knowing as we are known. Glory!

**D. Sign gifts are mentioned as having passed away (verse 8).**

Extrabiblical revelatory prophecies (revelations of divine truths not recorded in Holy Scripture) continue no longer. They have passed away in the full revelation contained in the Bible. Supernatural endowments of knowledge, by which one is guided through information not recorded in the Bible, are no more. That gift has vanished away. The miraculous ability to speak in a hitherto unknown language so as to communicate to hearers the message of God has automatically ceased of itself. Prophecy, knowledge, and languages are no longer given as New Testament spiritual gifts.

It is no sign of spirituality to duplicate a gift God has not given you. It is sinful presumption instead. Be content to identify the serving gift you have. Develop your ability to use it in God's service. Devote your life to serving people in the area in which God has enabled you to serve.

The Holy Spirit chooses sovereignly which gift He will give to each person (I Corinthians 12:11). He makes the choice; He confers the gift. Be content with His endowment.

Concentrate on the beautiful serving gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8. If God chooses to manifest a sign gift according to His will, rejoice. But be a faithful steward by taking every opportunity to use your spiritual gift to serve.

## Questions

1. How can you identify a temporary spiritual gift?
2. What does Mark 16:17-20 say was the purpose of sign gifts?
3. How were sign gifts related to proclaiming the gospel?
4. What are the gifts of healings?
5. What is the gift of tongues?
6. What is “*that which is perfect*” when sign gifts cease?
7. At what time is the “*now*” and “*then*” of 1 Corinthians 13:12?
8. What sign gifts are said to pass away in I Corinthians 13:8?

9. How can you concentrate on the serving gifts of Romans 12:6-8?
10. How does the completed Scripture make sign gifts unnecessary today?